

Planning Commission Meeting for New Castle City took place on May 23, 2011 at 6:30 p.m. in the City of New Castle's Town Hall.

Members Present: David Bird, Chair
William Simpson, Co-Chair
Joe DiAngelo
Susan Marinelli
Florence Smith

Members Absent: Dr. Jack Norsworthy
Dorsey Fiske
Vera Worthy
Jonathan Justice

Also Present: City Planner Marian Hull, URS; Building Inspector Jeff Bergstrom; Mayor Don Reese

Mr. Bird called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum was declared.

Approval of Minutes – Mr. DiAngelo noted one minor text change on page 4. A motion was made and seconded to approve the corrected minutes. The minutes were approved.

Update on Planning Studies – Ms. Hull reported that at this time nothing concerning rezoning of the Gateway District is on City Council's agenda for June. This body passed a recommendation to be provided to City Council and Ms. Thomas is aware the item is being addressed at tonight's meeting.

Capital Improvements Program –Ms. Hull prepared a proposal to complete the Capital Improvements Plan several months ago that was submitted to Council. Council has not acted on this. URS is ready to move forward with this proposal should the City decide to do so. The level of detail of a capital improvement program was designed to fit the \$12,000 that was budgeted. Mr. Simpson asked if there is a paper trail that supports what has taken place. He would like feedback from other bodies to know what is going on. He is concerned that we may not be up to date unless someone attends a particular meeting.

Mr. Simpson made a motion to develop a checklist (including signatures) for City Council for recommendations the Planning Commission forwards to Council that tracks their actions and would include feedback so this body knows the status of a recommendation. Ms. Marinelli seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Bird will work with Ms. Thomas to develop this document and bring it to the next Planning Commission meeting.

Budget Review – Mr. Simpson got some feedback on some of the things that are charged against the Planning Commission. He is concerned with monies that come back and goes into the general fund rather than being credited to the Planning Commission. Mr. Bird stated that prior to last year the previous two years we received approximately \$30,000 and last year we received \$12,000, which was targeted for a Capital Improvements Program. The budget hearing for the Planning Commission is scheduled for Thursday, 5/26/11.

Proposed Riverfront Concept Plan – WILMAPCO did not approve the grant we requested for the waterfront and parking access plan. Those funds come from federal transportation funds. Heather Dunigan of WILMAPCO was present and explained there were many requests for monies this year and explained how eligibility was determined. Anything with a piece of a project that was not eligible was deemed totally ineligible. The parking component of the plan the Planning Commission requested is eligible. She has talked to her executive director who believes more funding is worthy and it will help the New Castle transportation plan going forward. We may be able to get 20%-30% funding for the project in addition to WILMAPCO support.

Mr. Bird informed at the last WILMAPCO Public Advisory Meeting (*Public Advisory Committee member*) there was a presentation by a rail transit representative from DelDOT who reported a study being taken in 2012 to extend rail service to the south using freight rail tracks from the Wilmington area to possibly the beach area. (*Discussion followed that included a workshop about the transportation plan that will be presented by DelDOT at Carrie Downie School. Ms. Dunigan provided some detail on what might be covered and Ms. Hull will be attending.*)

Proposed Riverfront Concept Plan – Linda Ratchford, Gail Sykes, and Hick Rowland from the Historic New Castle Alliance addressed the plan. Ms. Ratchford distributed information to Commissioners of a concept of what they could be doing at the waterfront. The concept includes interest from the Kalmar Nyckel, Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA), the river front cruise from Wilmington, the Delaware City Marina, a bike-ferry concept that connects with area greenways, and Fort Mott and the Coastal Heritage Program. Opening the waterfront would be beneficial for economic development, tourism and residents. Since the April meeting they have talked to the Good Will Fire Co. about their rescue boat operations. Mr. Rowland reported they are very enthusiastic about having their rescue boat docked in the water and cited response time being reduced from 28 minutes to 6 minutes. Discussion about issues with the boat ramp at the foot of Third Street where the sailing club is located was detailed. Ms. Ratchford added that bringing more river traffic to the area would benefit from having a rescue boat readily accessible in the water.

Requests for proposals were sent out and 3 responses were received. Ms. Ratchford summarized the elements needed about what needs to be produced. They need a concept study that links with greenway plans and parking but their focus is on the waterfront. Next would be surveys, hydrology and permitting. (*They have discussed this work with 3 firms. She detailed bids from each firm and the work involved with each. Lengthy discussion followed.*)

Concerning total projects costs, Mr. Bird thinks the Planning Commission, with input from Ms. Hull and WILMAPCO, can come up with a strategy. This doesn't preclude us from asking for a certain amount of funding for a concept plan for next year.

The firms being considered are highly regarded and provide quality work. They have different approaches to the work, but the New Castle Historic Alliance would be comfortable with either firm. Mr. Simpson cautioned the need to know what permits are needed and who owns property that may be affected.

Ms. Dunigan said they can consider federal transportation enhancement monies through DelDOT (requires 20% match) that allows for water-based transportation.

Ms. Sykes said for the next phase of permitting/feasibility that City matching funds will be required.

Considering the information provided Mr. Bird opened discussion on the amount to request for its budget request. He would like to present a specific amount.

(Ms. Marinelli left the meeting – 7:30 p.m.)

Lengthy discussion about the amount followed and included various funding options. Consideration must also be given to the comprehensive plan through the capital improvements plan.

Mr. DiAngelo asked if City Council is aware of this program and Ms. Sykes assured him they are aware as are all City entities (MSC, Council, current and previous mayor) and agreed to pursue this project at a meeting last year. In January 2011 they met with representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers, DRBA and DNREC and the State Historical Preservation Office. Everyone was in agreement with the plan.

Mr. DiAngelo noted an editorial correction on distributed materials. Change “Planning Committee” to read “Planning Commission.” The change will be made.

Ms. Smith asked about cruises coming to the City. Mr. Simpson raised the possibility of converting the old ferry wharf on Chestnut Street by reclaiming the area from the river. He added that historic cruises from that area would be nice.

Once this project comes into fruition Mr. Bird said it would generate commerce and entrepreneurs and proposals for other areas of the riverfront could happen. He likened this to be a revival of the area and believes there is support from the community as long as it is done on a limited basis.

Mr. Bird will request \$40,000 over 2 years for this project plus funding for the Capital Improvement Program with the recommendation we may be able to get grant money for the future. He would like to get some commitment from the City that if we do not get other funds they might support our efforts. Mayor Reese reminded that funding for the professional planning services provided by URS be included in the Planning Commission’s budget.

Other Business

Jonathan Justice was announced as a new Planning Commission member.

Comments from the Public

Ms. Janet Wurtzell is concerned with people bringing unfavorable businesses (including chain businesses) to the City. She cited Martha’s Vineyard and Sanibel Island as examples of communities who have been successful with keeping chain businesses out of their areas. She cautioned that having design requirements does not always protect a community. Ms. Hull

said zoning variances, including design standards, varies state to state. Regulating businesses on the basis of ownership requires detailing concerns and what you can relate back to legally and strictly ownership is not one of those. Mr. Bird suggested being proactive with the types of businesses the City wants to attract.

Next Meeting – The next scheduled meeting is 6/27/11 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment – **A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Turner

Debbie Turner
Stenographer